

The Mud Clerk

By Irvin S. Cobb

FOR making a mud clerk this is your recipe: First you catch a youth who thinks he wants to grow up to be a steamboatman. Formerly that part of it was a very much easier task than it is today.

Having caught him, to accustom him to irregular hours and broken sleep and to all kinds of weathers and all kinds of underfootings, you teach him to walk uphill of a swaying stage-plank and to jump for the bank before your packet's nose touches, and if a bank which frequently is slick with yellow mire or treacherous with crumbly dried clods. You school him to perform his duties on shore with accuracy and dispatch and then, as she pulls out, to do a flying leap for the tip of a sloped swinging perch and—even though his feet may be dumps of sticky clay, and often are—to balance himself thereon like a bareback-rider on a hump-backed horse. Finally you must make him satisfied with small wages and what he can eat, which usually is a considerable amount, and with his comparatively humble place near the foot of the roster.

But as regards young Benny Dozier, they did not have to catch him. He had it, as you might say, in his blood, being the last of a list of steamboatmen. His father before him had been one and likewise at least two of his uncles were clerks. So one day in his nineteenth year when he went, all tangled up in his long arms and legs, down the hill and sought out Captain Nick Rodabush, of the Richmond P. Hobson, and diffidently stated his ambitions and said, while vainly endeavoring to swallow several invisible pigeon-eggs, that he had heard there was a vacancy in the office and he hoped—fumbling now with his large red hands—that his application might formally be considered, he was accepted on the spot.

To the appraising eye of Captain Nick this did not seem exactly prime material, but material of any sort was harder to come by than it once upon a time had been. Things no longer were as they had been when a skipper might pick and choose among the smart juveniles of the community. As Mr. Jericho Haley, the official pessimist of the local wharf, had said in the captain's hearing just here the other day:

"What's the use of the gov'mint talkin' about squanderin' all these here millions of dollars fur locks and dams and sitch tryin' to make a nine-foot stage the year 'round? In the first place, they couldn't never do it, it bein' ag'in' the plan of Gord Almighty Hime'y; and in the second place, 's'posen' they could? It'd take years and years to finish the job, wouldn't it?"

"Well, fifteen years from now, yer, or ten, the way things air goin' now, wherd'd they git the crews to run them fleets of new-fangled steel freighters they talk so biggitty about? How many pilots and engineers and so forth did there used to be hangin' 'round this very town? And how many of 'em air left? And how many likely boys air takin' up steamboatin' fur a livin'? Jest about one where there used to be forty—jest about!"

In a measure, Captain Rodabush shared these gloomy viewpoints. A majority of the veterans did share them. Still, he needed a mud clerk. He took what he could get. There were occasions subsequently when he was moved to remark:

"Yes, and one foot of a git I got, too!"

Because young Benny Dozier was not a glittering success at his chosen profession. It wasn't for lack of trying. One outstanding trouble with Benny was that he couldn't control his unruly members. He was incredibly awkward. Walking at ease—if so gauging and loose-jointed a gait as his might he said to have any ease in it—he would lumber along making loud sounds with his heels, and if he sought to hurry he frequently tripped himself. He got in his own way; what was worse, he



C. P. Winfrey's manner toward Kansas was protective. So that was how it was? Benny would show her the stuff that was in him!

couldn't for the life of him manage to keep out of the way of anyone else. Another score countable against him was that he so easily lost his head which, as his impatient superiors had been heard to exclaim, was a very trifling loss indeed and not worth worrying over.

In small emergencies a terrific embarrassment overcame this unfortunate young man so that his tongue faltered and his Adam's apple emotionally rose and fell and his constellation of freckles stood out like paled and plaintive stars from the blinding sunset of his blushes. Finally, and for the summing-up, he was chronically addicted to the habit of falling in love. Over, though, on the credit side of the ledger there was this to be said for him: He wasn't afraid of work; and he had a wonderful disposition. In spite of everything else, you just had to like him.

Falling in love—that, it was commonly agreed, remained his greatest fault. With or without provocation, and lacking any encouragement whatsoever, he gave his ardent heart to every personable female, maiden or widow, as it might be, who set foot aboard the Richmond P. Hobson. He always got it back though. That hopeful heart of his seemed to have the resiliency of new rubber but the durability of cast-iron. It and its owner got to be a standing joke with the rest of the white crew. They raked him with their teasing. Behind his back, the darkies sniggered at him.

"Look out to stand by, kid," someone, with a wink and a grin, would say. "Yonder comes another member of the opposin' sex."

"Oh, shut up your mouth and quit your foolin'," the victim would say, gulping hard. "You fellows make me sick."

"You're sick all right but none of us ain't responsible fur it." "Say, let up, won't you please?"

A Story of the Romantic River



Illustrations
by Forrest
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"Love-sickness—that's what ails you, my son, and from the way it looks to me, you've got the trouble in the most violent form there is. I reckon there's no hope for you neither till some woman up and marries you."

That's said to work a complete cure in some cases. Certainly ridicule did not help the complaint. On an average of about once a month he could be counted upon to oblige the steamer's company.

There was the lovely little heiress from away up North, the one with the blue eyes and the maize-yellow hair, who was on her way to Shiloh with her grandfather, a veteran of the Union armies, and now, by all accounts including his own, preeminent in the flour-milling interests of St. Paul, Minnesota. She was worshiped dumbly and from afar—Benny did much of his worshipping at a distance—until the spoiled beauty, perhaps not knowing her voice carried to him, or perhaps not especially caring whether it did—being at the age when pretty girls are likely to be cruel by intent—inquired of Mr. Given, the chief engineer, why that gawky, sandy-headed young man hadn't learned to remember where he put his feet down, so that the next time he wanted to use them he could pick them up again without stumbling over one or both. He fled away then, with the hateful sounds of Mr. Given's horse-laugh ringing in his tingling ears, and during the remainder of her journey ventured no more within tongue-range of her.

And—to cite a particularly joyous instance—there was the graceful, full-voiced star pitcher of the Amazonian Diamond Champe, a somewhat weather-beaten aggregation of athletic prodigies whose predecessors of a decade or two before had been known to fame as the Chicago Bloomer Girls. The champions were going up the river to fill an engagement with a crack amateur side at Sheffield. Young Benny took one look at the lot of them and made instant choice and succumbed utterly.

That same evening, skepticism regarding the authenticity of his handsome charmer was aroused in the breast of Mr. Childers, the head clerk. These doubts were confirmed next morning

during the breakfast hour as this shrewd observer killed along past the ladies' table and saw where, under the rose powder on those rounded cheeks, the suspect needed a shave.

He kept the gorgeous news for a select few who joined him in a secret campaign of watchful waiting. They had their reward when, before gleeful witnesses, young Dozier mustered up the courage to offer the object of his admiration a floral gift—specifically, a rather dusty and shop-worn "winter bouquet" purchased by him in a general store at a way-landing—whereupon the recipient, stepping for the moment out of character, ungraciously declared that a chew of tobacco would be preferable to a bunch of dried fodder every time.

They almost laughed the boy to death over that affair.

And there—oh, there must have been fully a dozen at least, all of them processionally compassed within Benny Dozier's first year of service. One round trip for falling in love and three ensuing round trips for getting over it—that made four weeks, roughly—and then he would be all set and eager for a fresh start. Mr. Given claimed that having Benny along was like having an animated calendar—you knew when the new moon was due just by keeping an eye on their mad clerk.

It was perhaps characteristic of the species that when Benny Dozier finally did go the limit, amatively speaking, he should dedicate his affections to one who, both in years and experience, ranked him by very considerable margins. At thirty-five, or thereafter even, your average unattached male is given to looking with delight upon mere chicks in their alluring latter teens. The winsome damsel scarce can be too young or too tender for his fancy.

But at twenty—and Benny had recently celebrated his twentieth anniversary when this came to pass—one frequently prefers the maturer types. All at once, so it seemed to him, he realized he had been wasting his time and his thoughts—and on occasion his salary—upon miscellaneous females, while through this storm-tossed, this bitter-mixed with sweet period, a kindly destiny was preserving him expressly for Miss Rosetta Finchley.

Miss Rosetta Finchley did not enter his life and then swiftly depart out of it again leaving a void, as each of those others had done. To be sure, she came and she went, but regularly at spaced intervals she reappeared. She was a traveling saleswoman for a jobbing establishment in Chattanooga, and her territory was the lower valley of the Tennessee River.

On a dewy spring morning at some inconsequential port which thereafter would remain photographed on Benny's brain as the sun-gilded background for a most glorious vision, she boarded the Richmond P. Hobson. Subsequently and on into the summer, she preferably booked her passages on the same packet. For the trig and tailor-made Miss Finchley would never see her thirtieth birthday excepting she looked over her shoulder and, in those three days of leisurely downstream journeying to the mouth, she had added not one but two strings to her bow.

She overlooked no chances, Miss Finchley, which perhaps accounted for her success against masculine competition on the high roads and the by-roads of merchandising. As between an excellent prospect and an easy conquest she would encourage the conquest until the prospect declared himself, one way or the other. And surely no one could blame her for that—at past thirty.

Something awakened in Benny's bosom the moment he knew her—something deep and strong, something which seemed to permeate every fiber of his being. It was a something which now would fill him with a desire to do noble deeds before the eyes of his lady-love and then again would make him crave to drop down before her and let her tread upon him with her dainty feet.

It made him lie awake through the night's more or less silent watches conjuring up gallant speeches for her private ear, only by day to turn him into an inarticulate and fumbling booby when the opportunity to speak came. It made him write wildly amorous verses, which he tore up, and stiff, formal letters, which he

mailed; and the verses were replete with "doves" and "doves" and "thou arts" and "my heart's" and "me's" and "thee's," but the letters always ended with "Yours Respectfully."

It made him long to grip the throat of Pilot Lon Winfrey and twist that useful organ beyond recognition, for in the dapper and self-confident Mr. Winfrey he jealously beheld a formidable rival. It made him crave to enfold her within an everlasting embrace, yet palsied his yearning arms did she but brush against him the hem of her garment. It even made him forget he had an appetite.

As proof thereof, take the blessed hour of the fragrant May nooning when first they met and had converse; or rather, she conversed, and he, red as a ripe beet and scuffling with his soles on the grit-covered hurricane roof, made signs and ruffled wordless sounds. Presently, stealing up from the pantry below, came rich frying smells. Also noises arose—the clatter of heavy chinaware, the tinkle of thick glassware.

YOUNG Ben harkened not, nor heeded, nor sniffed even. For once he was unaware of a clamorous gong being beaten by a cabin-boy who passed from cabin to boiler-deck. He was a king on a golden barque aglide over a silver sea.

It was the lady who eventually remarked that surely it must be dinner time, adding delicately and by way of a hint, that she had breakfasted early and sketchily. Mr. Given said later that he could not recall a previous instance of their mud clerk being so much as a half-minute late about getting there for a meal.

But now he actually dawdled over his food, Mr. Given also recording that phenomenon.

In short and in fine, Mr. Dozier was suffering the commonest form of the oldest and the maddest and the painfulest and the most delicious disease in the world, with not a single characteristic symptom missing.

Making her second trip a fortnight later, Miss Finchley the more securely riveted the shackles upon her junior captive, conceded such to be possible in the case of a prisoner already chained hand and foot. Mr. Winfrey, though, was inclined to be skittish; he was fascinated but he was careful of enticements and snares. He had been a care-free bachelor so long. He made an attentive courtier; still he showed reluctance for the hobbles and the halter which might be fashioned from the fabric of any straight-out declaration on his part.

It was on her next trip that Miss Finchley, being perhaps actuated by motives which under existing circumstances were perfectly legitimate, took advantage of a lull in a decidedly one-sided dialog with the apt and practically voiceless Benny, to ask questions regarding the prospective future of a steamboat clerk, as contrasted with, say for example, the position of an already established pilot. Or perhaps she merely spoke at random. Anyhow, she asked questions.

Of course it must be fine to graduate into a head-clerkship and to have so much responsibility and all that; but wasn't it true that promotions in this field so often came so slowly? A pilot had a very responsible post, too, didn't he?—different, of course, from a clerk's but with duties to perform which, if an accident occurred, such as a wreck or a fire, might affect the lives of the passengers. She'd heard somewhere, or read somewhere, that it was a pilot's place to stand to the wheel until the last soul was ashore even though he drowned or was burnt up. How noble an end that would be—to sacrifice one's own life for the sake of others!

But then, probably a good clerk never shirked danger, either; she was quite sure of that. So why was it—she couldn't help wondering—why was it a pilot drew a larger salary than any other officer in a crew did—more even sometimes than the captain? Maybe that wasn't so, though? Maybe that was just talk?

And why was it they insisted on calling the third clerk a mud clerk? Personally, she liked the title of third clerk so much better. It sounded so much more dignified. For one, she always thought

of him as the third clerk, never as the mud clerk. He believed that, didn't he?

He did—most gladly he did. He wished to tell her of clerks who had died at their posts, of subordinates who, in the midst of panic and dread disaster, had played heroic rôles. But her hand fell



Benny gave his orders bluntly

lightly then, in the merest suggestion of a caress, upon his quivering arm, and all he could do was mumble and wriggle and nod repeatedly.

Why must he be so dumb when torrents of eloquence surged within him? Why had nature set up those locked flood-gates down inside him? He told himself, since he could not tell her, that if ever there came a chance—well, he'd show her; he'd show

everybody else, too. Deeds spoke louder than words. Some gallant deed would be his advocate, revealing to her how boundless was his devotion, how resolute his character, how strong the very warp and fiber of him.

And on the second trip thereafter, Miss Finchley again being among those present, his chance did come. On the edge of

long stretch of cabin space, even with the doors and windows all opened, was draftless and terribly humid; you could have cooked eggs on the hurricane roof.

Supper having been eaten, the passengers and such members of the crew as were off watch, sat well forward on the boiler-deck in limp and listless discomfort and watched the twin rows of tall wooded hills slide past and vanish into the mists behind. Not a breath of air ruffled the surface of the water; it lay smooth and looked dead, and the approach of dusk brought no suggestion of coolness.

All at once the man in the pilot-house was aware of a curious sulphurous glowing against the heavens and, by reflection, upon the river. One moment it wasn't there and the next, so it seemed, it was. No wind had brought it, either, and yet beyond the skyline he caught a confused sound, a sort of far-away roaring sound. He shook his perspiring head in annoyance and bewilderment. For all that it glowed so, the manifestation gave off no real light.

On the contrary, the adjacent shore-marks had suddenly become indistinct behind a strange ominous haze.

The worried steersman peered right, then left, then ahead, and the perspiration in his palms congealed to a cold moisture, and he snatched his wheel over hard and yanked at his bell-cords, sending a jangle of alarm signals to the engineer, for he, before anyone else in authority, saw the thing coming.

It was coming up and at them out of the west as though the sun, going down so hot and angry, had foaled an aerial demon in its bed beyond the horizon. It literally leaped into view above where the paralleling lines of boundary bluffs seemed to come together in the next bend on beyond. It was not funnel-shaped as your summer twister usually is. It was of a cylindrical shape and it lacked the customary tail. It was yellowish with some green in it, and it had a sort of venomous radiance, and violently it spun about, spun about, like a balloon in a vortex.

Spinning and howling, it bounded over the hill-tops, the trees on the crests of the hills twisting and snapping and splitting under its passing swipe; and it dipped down and hit the river and turned it into an ugly sea; and caught the steamer a quartering stroke and tossed her about and sent her helplessly downstream, while a confused uproar of startled cries and shouted orders fused with the creaking of her timbers and the whining of her braces.

You would have said the storm had picked on the careening packet for its particular plaything, its favored toy. It encompassed her completely. It took her into its midst and sent her right down the river, and all the while she turned dizzily end for end, which however was in her favor—a straight-away blow of that force would have swamped her surely, but this sportive little monster, by buffeting her first on this flank and then on that, kept her revolving but also kept her from capsizing. For all that she circled so madly, her rate of speed was greater than ever it had been under steam.

It carried her along until a great glare of lightning burned a blazing seam through the brassy murk, and thunder powerful enough to be heard above the wind's screaming crashed out overhead. Therewith torrents of rain descended, and in the comparative peacefulness which instantaneously ensued, somebody called out in tones of shaky gratitude. "Thank God!"

Miraculously the Richmond P. Hobson found herself no longer playing that horrible tectotum game but rocking in the rumpled wake of her tormentor which, having disgorged her and taken a second bounce, was gone off and away for parts unknown.

as a distant, lemming tumult to the northeastward testified.

On the steamer, the relief succeeding the terror was fated to be a very brief relief. Because immediately, and before persons could take stock of their sensations or even remember what they had done and said, a fresh cause for apprehension arose. A frightened captain of the watch, whose ordinarily black skin had taken on the color of wet wood-ashes and still (Continued on page 117)



very personable female aboard the Richmond P. Hobson.

twilight of a baking hot evening, the Richmond P. Hobson, being upbound, ran headlong into a promising baby cyclone.

There was but little warning; indeed, you might say there was no warning at all. All that afternoon the packet had plowed along through cloaking blankets of heat under a lightly overcast sky.

The staterooms were like so many little bake-ovens; the

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mined that pallid overtone, ran up from below to spread the news that the hull had sprung a leak and was filling. Sharp on his coming, a slight listing, a certain legginess, confirmed his story.

The situation again was perilous. The captain and his crew realized that, and so, also very soon thereafter, did the huddled passengers realize it and one and all suffered a recurrence of that unpleasant sinking sensation at the pit of the stomach. The second panic almost overlapped the first, it followed so fast.

To begin with, an overwhelming and utter darkness had magically fallen. It was as though midnight had arrived four hours ahead of its schedule. You couldn't see your hand before your face. Across the blackness and under that terrific downpour, the land, either side, completely was blanked out.

The lights which the government maintained to serve as steering points were gone from this devastated stretch—overturned and dished out or bodily blown away. The pilot knew for certainties only that he had the battered craft under control once more and that, approximately, she must be near mid-stream since the currents tugged strongly at the wallowing hull. With relation to the adjacent topography he had a rough idea where he was, but nothing more than a rough idea. To top off, the searchlights at the bow were out of commission.

The lightning didn't help him either—it was too dazzling. All he could do was ring for full steam and point her nose blindly toward what he reckoned to be the nearer shore and drive ahead, trusting to Providence that, if she didn't founder before they got there, she would not smash headlong into a sheer rock cliff.

Already, by the master's orders, members of the crew had hauled life-preservers out of the storerooms and distributed them among the passengers milling to and fro on the drenched lee-deck, and bade them take stations on the steamer's upper works. Afterward it was narrated how a quivering presiding elder turned his scared face to a stolid hog-buyer and looked him between teeth that chattered:

"B-b-brother, can you pray?"

"Nope," answered the other, with a calmness which, under the circumstances and all things considered, must have been aggravating, "but as it so happens, I kin swim purty good."

Thereupon he made ready to swim. Quite a number did likewise.

Down the involuntary retreat of the Richmond P. Hobson, young Benny Dozier had lain in a pleasant coma on the starboard guards amidships. He remembered hearing the storm brewing. That was when he was on his way to the ladies' cabin on an errand for his beloved; she thought she had dropped her handkerchief there. He remembered this much and then for a spell he remembered nothing more whatsoever. A cross-hall door, torn from its hinges and pitched outward by the first great gust bursting in from the opposite direction, had dealt him so hard a blow on the head that he went right off to sleep.

He continued to sleep while the pocket did her whirl-a-jigging flight and slept on even after she had been spewed out of the cyclone's eye, like Jonah out of the whale's belly. What brought him to was a deluge of rain water upon his upturned face and a cabin-boy, who carried a flapping cork jacket on either arm, stepping upon him.

So he rose up, being still somewhat dizzy, and went running to find Miss Rosetta Finchley. His place was by her side, his task to rescue her if such were mortally possible and, failing at that, to perish with her.

But when, half a minute later, he found her and she refugeeing on the exposed hurricane roof with many others as sopping wet as she was—which was as sopping wet as it was humanly possible to be—there was, alas, no room for him

by her side. The available space by her side was ten feet or less from them when, by a dimmish illumination streaming from a window in the Texas just overhead, he saw them and they—or at least she—saw him. Mr. Winfrey was buckling one of the cork-stuffed vests about her. Even in a moment so parous, his manner was protective, proprietorial.

So that was how it was, was it? So be it then! He, Benny Dozier, mud clerk, would show her the stuff that was in him. He and he alone, would light for her a path to possible salvation.

At his lips he made a megaphone of his cupped hands and through it, across the intervening space, he shouted his altered intentions. It was doubtful whether she heard him—there was so much confusion and so great an outcry and such a cloudbursty spattering and pelting. So he worked his arms in a swift pantomime, striking himself on the breast, then pointing ahead and below and, seeing that she appeared to understand, he turned about and sped off, making for the lower deck. In the companion-way he met several passengers climbing up. Like a projectile he bored through them; and next, darting into the deserted cabin, he caught up, as he passed, his lantern from its ordained spot under the overhang of the clerk's window.

It was burning; an hour before the watchman had attended to that detail. As he loped outdoors again he turned the wick higher, shook the lantern to make the oil feed plentifully. In another flash he was below on the fore-castle, with both the mates and a handful of jabbering but disciplined roustabouts.

There was no need to tell First Mate Dink O'Ryan his purpose. At a glance that gentleman comprehended. He shook his head though, and fixed a detaining grip on Benny.

"What's the use, kid?" he asked. "Ef we're fixin' to butt into a bluff, which is what we're liable to do half a minute from now, you won't have a Chinaman's chance out yonder on the fur end of this here stage-plank. And ef it's thick timber you'll be breshed off like a—"

"Lemme 'lone!" snarled Benny. "You grab ahold of me! It's me goes ashore first of all the white officers when we make a landin', ain't it? Then, by gum, it's me goes first tonight!"

"It's your fun'el!" said Mr. O'Ryan. He mapped an order and, obeying him, his squad began to lower away on the slings of the gang-plank projecting like the big wooden antenna of a big wooden bug from the steamer's nose. When, swinging and dropping jerkily, it still was at an angle of thirty degrees or so, Benny started up it.

Benny could not swim a lick; he'd thought of that. He wore no life-preserver; he hadn't thought of that. He kept going.

For once in his steamboating career, his foot-grip on the stage was secure. Without a slip he made the farther end. He balanced there at the tip, swaying to its motion above the flattening swells, his figure outlined by his lantern gleam for those who watched from directly back of him and from the hurricane deck above. He hoped she was watching him. He felt like a demigod.

One split-second later he felt like a bullfrog—he behaved like one, too. There was a terrific jar somewhere beneath and behind him and the stage-plank bounced up like a spring-board, and Benny Dozier, becoming a comic thing of flying long arms and flying long legs, was catapulted ten feet into the air and ten feet more on into the night. He soared grotesquely, like a splayed comet, since by instinct he held still to his beacon. He came down head first, her plank, like a plummet lead. He went under water but—not very far under.

There was less than four feet of water over the sandy bar which made out below the outlet of Gum Slough. That twister had indeed borne the steamboat far back downstream—at least a mile farther back than her pilot's mental

calculation had allowed for. The abruptly halted craft ceased her quivering and even before Benny quit trying to swallow the Tennessee River and decided to come up, the captain from aloft had shouted out his glad tidings—the boat safely beached on a shallow and no more danger for anybody—and a halleluia chorus of thanksgiving was starting.

So then Benny came up, and he stood there shoulder-deep, facing the boat, and spat it out, pint by pint, and strove to readjust his mental processes. And then, right then, at that pregnant moment, he heard something which, ringing clear above all other sounds, pierced him like a sword. He heard her laughing. She laughed loudly and shrilly and without pause.

He thought—naturally he thought—she was laughing at him.

Wanly, he wiped his eyes and peered aloft and then a flash of lightning came—sheet lightning, this time, broadly illuminating—and he saw how, still rocking to her laughter, she was held fast in an encircling arm by the accursed Winfrey, her head against his breast, his free hand patting her on the back. Now was Benny to know that a lady in the acute hysteria following a severe nervous strain would be likely to lean for support against the nearest solid body?

Benny didn't know. Inside of his dank bosom something seemed to snap. He turned around and he waded away and the fringing bushes swallowed him up.

A young man lately in love had become a confirmed woman-hater, or believed he had. Beyond peradventure, a young steamboatman had definitely become an ex-steamboatman.

NEXT day at an inland station forty miles by the steam-cars from where he had gone ashore, the ex-steamboatman read in a Nashville morning paper a telegraphed account of the Richmond P. Hobson's misadventure. One paragraph down near the foot of the page he reread several times, meantime grinding his teeth.

This paragraph ran thus:

"The 'mud' clerk, 'Benny' Dozier, aged twenty, an orphan whose home-port is at Paducah, was at first reported missing but is now believed to be accounted for. A young man answering to his general description was said to have been seen by a farmer named Harper, residing some distance back in the valley, who is alleged to have stated that the person referred to passed his house afloat in a disheveled and apparently distracted state. It is believed that fright must have temporarily unhinged the youth's reason."

Two days thereafter, well below Memphis and across the Mississippi state-line the woman-hater applied for employment to the manager of a large lumbering concern. Rarely had he outlined his general qualifications, when the manager cut in with:

"That's enough—you look like maybe you might fill the bill. We're needing a shipping-clerk in the yards here and we're also needing somebody to do checking up—sort of a rough bookkeeping job, it is—at one of our camps down in Cameron Parish, Louisiana. One job 'll pay about as well as the other, but I figure you'd probably like the opening here the best, this being a good, lively, growing town with plenty of pretty girls and young fellows in it, whereas down yonder in Louisiana you'd be out in the tall timber with a boarding-gang, away off from everything, pretty near it, and liable not to see a white face outside of your own crew for weeks at a time. You see, I'm telling you beforehand what you'd be up against so there'll be no comeback afterwards. Well, what about it, son?"

"If you don't mind, I'll take the job that's plum' off in the deep woods, please, sah," said the woman-hater.